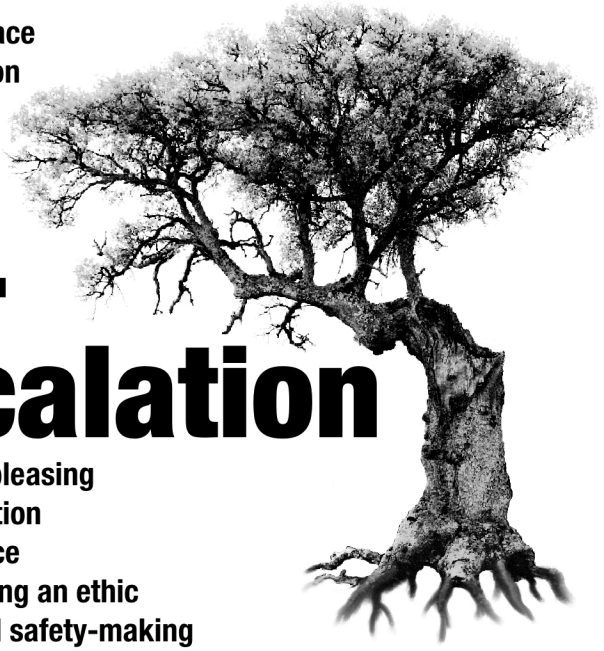
wielding peace
like a weapon



# de-escalation

not people-pleasing
not capitulation
not avoidance
but developing an ethic
of principled safety-making

## this text is made for communities

build and use these skills in your household, circle of friends, mutual aid organization, and affinity group

*lean on one another in moments of crisis*
adherence to a buddy system can save lives and amplify your power while maintaining accountability

***WE PROTECT US***



# Starting with Ourselves

Escalation is often cyclical in nature. As one person becomes more upset, the other reacts, creating a spiraling destabilization of the situation. One of the most important things we can do is check in with ourselves and our comrades to break the cycle on our terms. These same techniques can also inform how we talk to adversaries, and the more experience we have deescalating ourselves, the more effective we can be with those who are hostile to us.

# H.A.L.T.

**Are you...**

**Hungry?**

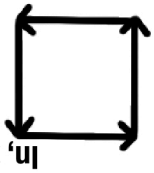
**Angry?**

**Lonely?**

**Tired?**

Before engaging further, make sure these core needs are met. When using this technique for others, use a HALT framing specifically if you know they have trained in it, or pose them as individual questions if they have not. Be careful not to come off as condescending and make sure you are inquiring from a genuine place of care.

# Box Breathing



In, 2, 3, 4
Hold, 2, 3, 4
Out, 2, 3, 4
Hold, 2, 3, 4

Throw your nervous system into manual!
Repeat as needed until you feel present.



# Verbal De-escalation Tactics

adapted from Vision Change Win

**Prevent:** Look for indicators; tension, history, raised voices, crowds coalescing, etc.

**Active Listening:** During conflict, people often feel unseen or unheard. Reflect back what you're hearing. ex."I hear you feel ignored"

**Empathize:** Validation can reduce tension. Try to see from the other's perspective. ex. "I understand", "I agree..."

**Evade/Escape:** Sometimes the best path is to leave or help the target of confrontation leave. Pursuing a physical block, getting additional people to help, and pretending to know someone to begin a new, separate conversation can all help.

**Distraction/Refocus:** Loud noises or bright light from a distance or changing conversation, asking to move locations, or proposing alternatives when engaged up close can all be effective means of distraction.

**Gather People:** People act differently when being observed. You can include others by saying things like "Do you see what's happening?" or "I think this person needs help."

**Giving Space:** Sometimes a crowd can be more escalatory than helpful. Use your judgement to decide whether asking a group to give people more space is the best move.

**Use Humor:** Humor used to relate can be deescalatory, while humor used to belittle can make things worse.

**Give Choices:** While in an escalated state, people tend to be especially sensitive to power dynamics. By giving them a sense of choice, you can allow them to preserve feelings of autonomy while keeping everyone safe. ex "I need to ask you to stop yelling or move into the other room."

**Use Your Voice:** Your tone, pace, and volume can all be used to convey calm, respect, or power. Talking slower and quieter can force your adversary to put more effort into listening.



# What Next?

Sometimes, despite our best efforts, situations escalate out of hand or a bad actor seems likely to continue attempting to agitate. At that point, we must make decisions about how to inform others and gain the upper hand. That is where the two folllowing techniques come into play.

## S.A.L.U.T.E.

**Size - how many?**
**Activity - what are they doing?**
**Location - where are they?**
**Unit - who are they affiliated with?**
**Time - when is it?**
**Equipment - what are they carrying?**

By focusing on concrete descriptors, we can provide more actionable information to one another and prevent the panic caused by being only partially informed. Try your best not to speculate and relay exactly what you are experiencing.

## O.O.D.A Loop

**Observe**
**Orient**
**Decide**
**Act**
*Repeat*

This is a simplified framework for how we make decisions. One of the most powerful tools we have is maintaining our ability to quickly process our surroundings, while disrupting our adversaries' attempts to do the same. Every time we disrupt this loop, it must start over. Make yourself hard to observe, make it more difficult for them to gain orientation, make the correct decision hard to ascertain, and you can make action impossible.